

Media Outreach

Tips

A successful media outreach approach can increase the success of your event. The following tips will help you...and capture media attention for your radon activity, event, or program.

Tell the radon story.

The best way to gain the media's attention is to provide facts about the dangers of radon to public health. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, second only to smoking, and radon exposure is the number one cause of lung cancer among non-smokers.

- ▶ Remember to involve the media in all radon-related activities, such as testing demonstrations and poster contests.
- ▶ Invite the media to talk with people who have tested their homes for radon and successfully mitigated the radon problem, or whose homes were built radon-resistant.
- ▶ Arrange for interviews with doctors and other respected experts and spokespeople who can discuss the dangers of radon and steps to mitigate health risks.
- ▶ Plan a press conference at an "on-the-scene" location, such as at a home that will be tested for radon to demonstrate how easy it is to test and to provide the media with a visual for publicizing the issue.

Once you have designed an interesting event, there are a few general steps you can follow to ensure that you get the best coverage possible.

Build successful relationships with the media.

- ▶ Establish a list of national and local media, taking note of beat reporters. Beat reporters are assigned to a specific area or topic, such as community health and science.
- ▶ Contact beat reporters and editors to introduce yourself and to establish a point of contact for information.
- ▶ Think of reporters as avenues for getting radon information to the public.

Start with a good list.

A good list is one that is relevant. In choosing whom to approach, it is important to consider who is likely to want to tell your radon story, as well as whom you would like to do it. You may want to include small newspapers and community newsletters in addition to major newspapers and television and radio stations. While you want to cast a broad net, you do not want to waste time and resources with media outlets or reporters who are not right for the event.

At major newspapers and television and radio stations, in most cases, it is appropriate to contact the assignment desk or assignment editor. The assignment editor will usually give you the name and contact information for the beat reporter who covers topics related to radon.

In radio, you should contact the news director. Your local library may have a media guide listing names and addresses of the people you may want to contact. You can usually get this information from the Web site of the radio station as well. Be sure to get your contact's e-mail address. Many reporters prefer to get releases and other background materials by e-mail rather than hard copy.

A good list is an accurate list. Once you have developed a list of potential contacts to target, double check that list for accuracy by calling the publication or station. Call the main number to make sure the person you have selected to contact is still in that position, and that the contact information you have is accurate.

Write a good pitch letter.

After you have your targeted list of reporters and editors, you need a pitch letter. The pitch letter tells editors and reporters why they should cover radon issues and your local program activities. Here are a few things to remember when writing your pitch letter.

- ▶ **A good letter is correct.** Double checking facts, spelling, and grammar is a crucial first step that is often overlooked. If the information in the letter isn't presented correctly, you may not get the coverage you want.
- ▶ **A good letter is concise.** Assignment editors and reporters have very limited time, and reading pitch letters isn't always a high priority. If you want to get coverage, you have to get their attention quickly and convey information efficiently. Your letter shouldn't be more than one page. A one-page letter can accurately convey the basic information: radon health risks; the reason your radon event is newsworthy; the time and location; and a number and person to call for more information. Include your press release and background about your organization with the letter, and answer any additional questions in your follow-up call.

Write a press release.

A well written press release can yield more media coverage than any amount of advertising could bring to radon. Please see pages 12-13 for press release tips and a sample press release.

Develop a media kit.

Make it as easy as possible for the media to do their jobs. Provide them with statistical information about radon from reputable sources and provide simple graphics if you have them. Anything you can do to make it easy for reporters to write a story will help. Put together a media kit with a full range of information about radon issues, testing and mitigation, radon-resistant new construction, and the specifics of your radon event. A media kit can include the following materials:

- ▶ Pitch letter
- ▶ Press release*
- ▶ Radon fact sheet*
- ▶ Radon materials order form*
- ▶ Biography or background information of speakers and experts available to talk about radon issues
- ▶ Proclamation*
- ▶ Calendar of events
- ▶ List of radon kit manufacturers and laboratories and their toll-free numbers
- ▶ List of local stores that carry radon kits, complete with contact information
- ▶ Your contact information
- ▶ State radon program contact information
- ▶ Web site addresses as appropriate

Follow up.

You've sent your materials out to the reporters and editors on your list and allowed time for them to look over the information. Now it's time to make follow-up calls. During your follow-up calls, you should:

- ▶ **Be prepared.** Make notes for your calls and be prepared to take notes during the calls. Plan what you are going to say ahead of time and stick to it. Try to anticipate any questions or objections you might hear and have an answer prepared. Always remind the media that radon is a serious health risk that is easy to overlook because it is an odorless, invisible, and tasteless killer. Also remember to send the message that radon testing and mitigation is convenient and cost-effective.
- ▶ **Be polite and brief.** Editors and reporters are usually on a very tight schedule and they will appreciate it if you get right to the point. Identify yourself, tell them why you are calling, and offer to answer any questions they may have.
- ▶ **Ask for coverage.** After you have confirmed receipt of your letter and answered any questions, ask for coverage of your event.

*Samples of these materials are included in this Event Planning Kit. Some samples are provided in MS Word and can be accessed at www.epa.gov/radon/rnactionmonth.html.

Remember these points.

Timing is everything. Consider the editor's schedule when you place your calls. Newspapers are usually working on a mid-afternoon deadline for the next day, so late afternoon is the best time to call. Call the staff of noon news programs after 3:00 p.m. and call the evening news in the morning.

More than one call may be required. This is especially true with television stations. Often the assignments for a given day are not made until that morning. The station's ability to send a crew to your event can be affected by other events taking place that day. If a media outlet has expressed interest in covering your event but has not committed to it, call on the day of the event and ask again for their coverage and remind them of the details.

Don't get discouraged. You are competing against other story ideas and current events. You might feel as though you are getting the run-around. It's possible that one person will tell you to speak to another or to call back at another time. If so, follow their directions. It is also possible that people will be short with you because they are busy. The best strategy is to be courteous, helpful, creative, and most of all, persistent. Remember that the media needs news to fill their programs and newspapers. Let them know why your story is worthy and make it as easy as you can for them to cover your issue and events.

Reporters may not attend your press conference as a matter of policy. This is where personal relationships help in convincing them to make an exception. However, if a reporter tells you in advance that he or she will not be able to make it to your press conference, send them a press release anyway and encourage them to use the information to build a story with their own sources. Determine the point of contact reporters may attempt to call for additional information and discuss with these individuals the importance of providing a clear message that emphasizes the health risks and the opportunities for managing the risks. The best way to establish good relationships with the media is to offer them opportunities for interesting and newsworthy stories. Offer a hard-to-get interview, local human interest stories, eye-catching visuals or pictures, and good audio for those in radio news. Always present your information as something that readers, listeners, and viewers deserve to learn.